



STATE OF WASHINGTON POTATO COMMITTEE

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November 3, 2005

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service
Fruit and Vegetable Programs
Fresh Products Branch
1400 Independence Avenue SW., Room 0640-S

Washington DC 20250-0237

RE: Docket No. FV04-310 – FR Vol. 70, No. 202 – Thursday, October 20, 2005 – 61068
Docket No. FV04-310 – FR Vol. 70, No. 164 – Thursday, August 25, 2005 – 49882

To Whom It May Concern:

This comment is in response to the proposed increase of approximately 15 percent on certain fees charged for the certification for fresh fruits and vegetables inspected at destination markets. It is very apparent when reading the proposed rule that a user-based fee increase is the only action being considered to help support the program. We assume that all other means to gain efficiency in the program have been achieved.

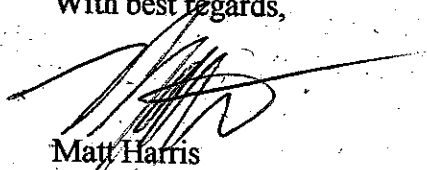
The potato industry certainly understands the rising costs of salaries and benefits in the U.S. and the fact that providing your type of services is dependent on human capital. We also understand the need for fee increases to meet operating budget and reserve requirements.

However, the statement that the Fresh Electronic Inspection Reporting/Resource System (FEIRS), intended to automate and streamline the process will take additional funding to maintain on top of increased personnel and personnel costs is untenable. The FEIRS system is appreciated by users. In fact, a comment that we have received expressed the opinion that the FEIRS program was very successful at the terminal market and that AMS would improve efficiency by developing implementation at shipping point. Clearly, better use of existing technology should be considered as part of the solution to the funding problem.

The potato industry is feeling much funding pressure of its own and has no choice to opt-out of the inspection process, as other businesses you mention who participate voluntarily. If the 15 percent increase is necessary at this time, we fully expect to see greater efficiencies within the Fresh Products Branch and no similar increase in the near future.

Thank you for accepting our testimony in this matter.

With best regards,



Matt Harris
Manager
State of Washington Potato Committee

cc by email only:

Congressman Rick Larsen
Congressman Doc Hastings
Congresswoman Cathy McMorris
Senator Patty Murray
Senator Maria Cantwell
Lloyd C. Day, Administrator
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